

Advancing inclusive education in the Philippines through international capacity building, research, and sustainable teacher development

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ABSTRACT

Philippines has enacted a rights-based policy architecture for inclusive education, most prominently Republic Act No. 11650, yet implementation depends on the ability of schools and teachers to translate statutory commitments into daily instructional practice. This paper presents a practice-based framework derived from the international professional development initiative Empowering Educators: Global Collaboration Toward Inclusive Excellence. The initiative combined three virtual Knowledge and Skills Acquisition sessions and one intensive Knowledge and Skills Transfer workshop for Filipino educators. Session 1 established program goals and inclusive-education expectations and received 80 exit-ticket responses, with a mean confidence rating of 4.45 out of 5. Session 2 addressed foundations of special education, identification, individualized education programs, inclusion, and legal rights; mean scores increased from 3.55 to 4.54 on a five-item assessment. Session 3 focused on learner transitions; mean scores increased from 4.67 to 4.93, indicating consolidation of already strong baseline knowledge. The intensive workshop emphasized behavior intervention, IEP development, differentiated instruction, Universal Design for Learning, executive functioning, autism and sensory supports, and progress monitoring; 27 participants completed applied workshop activities. Across the program, learning products included IEP components, behavior intervention plans, differentiated lesson designs, assessment tools, and transition-planning materials. The paper integrates these program findings with Philippine policy, teacher professional standards, implementation science, adult learning, and communities-of-practice literature. It proposes a six-component national framework: competency-based professional learning; contextualized implementation tools; coaching and professional learning communities; school-based demonstration projects; monitoring, evaluation, and research; and governance for scale and sustainability. The framework is intended as a policy and implementation model rather than as evidence of nationwide effectiveness. Findings support the feasibility of a locally adapted, data-informed capacity-building approach while also demonstrating the need for stronger research designs, longer-term follow-up, learner-level outcomes, and institutional partnerships.

Keywords: Inclusive education, Republic Act No. 11650, special education, teacher professional development, Philippines, implementation science, knowledge and skills transfer.

Date Submitted: June 28, 2026

Date Accepted: July 20, 2026

Date Published: July 28, 2026

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DOI: <http://doi.org/10.69651/PIJHSS05031357>

Recommended citation:

Elimanco, R. M. M. (2026). Advancing inclusive education in the Philippines through international capacity building, research, and sustainable teacher development. *Pantao (International Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences)* 5 (3), 1678-1689. <http://doi.org/10.69651/PIJHSS05031357>

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is both a human-rights obligation and a system-improvement strategy. It requires education systems to recognize learner variability, remove barriers to participation, and provide meaningful access to curriculum, assessment, relationships, and school life. UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report emphasizes that inclusion is not a separate program for a small group; it is a principle for the design of the entire education system (UNESCO, 2020). For the Philippines, this principle has been strengthened through Republic Act No. 11650 and earlier Department of Education policies governing services for learners with disabilities, Child Find, inclusive learning resource centers, and teacher professional standards.

The central policy challenge is implementation. Teachers may support the principle of inclusion but still lack preparation in individualized planning, differentiated instruction, behavior support, assistive technology, family collaboration, data use, and transition services. Resource constraints and large classes can further widen the distance between policy expectations and school realities. A sustainable response must therefore combine legal and policy literacy with practical tools, professional learning, coaching, and local problem solving.

The initiative examined in this paper was created to address that implementation gap through cross-national knowledge exchange. Its purpose was not to transfer a foreign special education system wholesale to Philippine schools. Rather, it sought to translate selected evidence-informed practices into locally useful forms, aligned with Philippine standards and implemented through accessible professional learning. The series included an orientation session, a foundations session, a transition-planning session, and an intensive application workshop.

Republic Act No. 11650, signed in 2022, establishes a policy of inclusion and services for learners with disabilities. Its policy direction includes access to free and appropriate public early and basic education, support and related services, preparation for independent living and community participation, and the establishment of Inclusive Learning Resource Centers. The statute places inclusion within a coordinated system involving education, health, social welfare, local government, families, and other stakeholders. The law therefore requires more than classroom placement; it calls for assessment, planning, accessible services, professional capacity, coordination, and accountability.

DepEd Order No. 044, s. 2021 provides policy guidance for educational programs and services for learners with disabilities in the K to 12 basic education programs. DepEd Order No. 045, s. 2021 addresses the conversion of selected SPED centers into prototype Inclusive Learning Resource Centers. DepEd Order No. 023, s. 2022 establishes a Child Find policy to strengthen identification, referral, assessment, and educational planning. These policies create a coherent implementation chain: locate and identify learners; assess needs; design appropriate programs and supports; build accessible school capacity; and monitor participation and learning.

The Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers provide an important accountability and development structure for inclusive education. The KST/KSA activities were mapped to domains including content knowledge and pedagogy, learning environment, diversity of learners, curriculum and planning, assessment and reporting, community linkages, and personal growth and professional development. Such alignment is useful because it connects inclusive education to the professional work of all teachers rather than treating it as the responsibility of SPED personnel alone.

International evidence cautions against equating inclusion with physical placement. Inclusion requires changes in culture, policy, curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, leadership, financing, infrastructure, and community relationships. UNESCO (2020) argues that learner

diversity should be treated as a strength and that education systems must address the mechanisms that exclude students because of disability, poverty, language, geography, and other characteristics. This system perspective is especially relevant to geographically dispersed and resource-constrained settings, where school-level adaptation must be supported by district and division structures.

Teacher readiness is consistently identified as a central condition for inclusive education. Brief awareness seminars can improve attitudes and vocabulary but are less likely to change practice unless they include modeling, active learning, feedback, coaching, and sustained collaboration. Effective professional development is content-focused, coherent with standards, participatory, practice-oriented, and extended over time. The KST/KSA model incorporates several of these features through sequenced sessions, applied outputs, assessment, and planned follow-up, although coaching and classroom observation remain underdeveloped.

Adult learning theory suggests that professional learning is strongest when participants perceive immediate relevance, draw on prior experience, solve authentic problems, and apply new knowledge to real tasks. Knowledge transfer also depends on the similarity between training tasks and workplace demands, opportunities to practice, feedback, leadership support, and reinforcement after training. Accordingly, the framework proposed here treats workshop participation as the beginning of implementation rather than its endpoint.

Statement of the problem

This paper has four purposes: (a) to synthesize the policy and research rationale for sustained teacher capacity building in inclusive education; (b) to document the design and early outcomes of the KST/KSA initiative; (c) to identify lessons, limitations, and ethical considerations; and (d) to propose a national implementation framework that can be tested, refined, and scaled through formal partnerships.

1. What implementation capacities do Philippine teachers and schools need to operationalize inclusive education?
2. What does the initial KST/KSA evidence suggest about the feasibility and acceptability of an internationally supported, locally aligned professional learning model?
3. How can the model be strengthened into a sustainable framework for school, district, division, and regional implementation?
4. What research design is needed to evaluate teacher practice, school systems, and learner outcomes over time?

METHODOLOGY

This paper uses a descriptive, practice-based program evaluation design that synthesizes administrative records, narrative reports, exit ticket summaries, pre/post assessments, participant feedback, competency alignment tables, and workshop products from four professional learning events. The evaluation is intended to assess feasibility, participation, immediate learning, and implementation readiness. It is not an experimental evaluation and does not establish causal effects on teacher practice or learner outcomes.

Participants included general education teachers, SPED teachers, school leaders, support personnel, and volunteer educators, with participation varying by session. Session 1 included 80 exit ticket respondents. Session 2 included 76 pre-test and 77 post-test submissions, and two duplicate responses were identified during data validation. Session 3 included 79 attendees, with 75 pre-test and 69 post-test submissions. The intensive workshop report

documented 27 participants. Because identifiers and matched pair data were not consistently available, aggregate comparisons are reported.

Measures included short knowledge assessments, confidence ratings, qualitative exit ticket responses, participant products, and facilitator reports. The assessments were developed for program monitoring and were aligned with session content; they were not externally validated instruments. Product quality was described in program records but was not independently scored using a blinded rubric.

The analysis used descriptive statistics reported in the program documents and thematic synthesis of narrative evidence. Mean differences are presented as immediate learning indicators. No inferential tests are reported because the available documentation did not consistently provide matched individual level scores, variance estimates, or complete raw datasets. Future research should obtain formal ethics review when data are collected for generalizable research rather than routine program improvement. Participation should be voluntary, informed consent should be documented, identifiable data should be minimized, and school and learner information should be protected. Evaluation reports should distinguish attendance, satisfaction, knowledge gain, implementation fidelity, and learner outcomes. Claims should remain proportionate to the strength of the design.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the results and discussion of the evaluation, which drew upon documentation from four professional learning events involving a combined total of 80 exit-ticket respondents in Session 1, 76 pre-test and 77 post-test respondents in Session 2, 79 attendees with 75 pre-test and 69 post-test respondents in Session 3, and 27 participants in the intensive Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes (KST/KSA) workshop. The evaluation employed a descriptive, practice-based program evaluation design that synthesized administrative records, narrative reports, exit-ticket summaries, pre/post assessments, participant feedback, competency-alignment tables, and workshop products, with data analyzed through descriptive statistics reported in the program documents and thematic synthesis of narrative evidence. The discussion that follows is grounded entirely in the data gathered from these four sessions, and all results are interpreted in direct relation to the objectives of the evaluation, namely to assess feasibility, participation, immediate learning, and implementation readiness across the professional learning initiative.

Session 1 served as the orientation phase of the program, during which eighty respondents completed exit tickets. The reported mean confidence rating was 4.45 out of 5, with fifty-five respondents selecting the highest rating and five selecting ratings of one or two. This distribution indicates that the majority of participants left the orientation session with a strong sense of confidence regarding the program's purpose and scope, although a small subset of respondents reported comparatively low confidence, suggesting uneven readiness even at the outset of the initiative. Qualitative responses indicated understanding of the program's purpose and scope, increased awareness of inclusive education, and interest in future sessions, findings that collectively point to a positive initial reception of the program among participants. The evaluation also recommended clearer session roadmaps, guide questions, earlier interactive activities, anonymous question mechanisms, and targeted support for participants with lower confidence, recommendations that suggest that while orientation was generally well received, structural refinements are needed to more consistently support the small proportion of participants who began the program with lower confidence levels.

Session 2, which addressed foundations, IEPs, inclusion, and legal rights, showed the largest documented immediate knowledge increase among the four sessions. The pre-test mean was 3.55 out of 5 among 76 respondents, while the post-test mean was 4.54 among 77

respondents, a difference of 0.99 points. Program records interpreted this shift as movement from developing toward proficient or advanced performance, and item-level evidence suggested gains in identification, inclusive classroom practice, IEPs, accommodations, and learner rights. This magnitude of change indicates that the session content was effective in shifting participants' self-reported and tested understanding of core inclusive education concepts within a single session. However, because the pre-test and post-test samples were not confirmed as matched pairs, and the sample sizes differed slightly (76 versus 77), the difference should be interpreted as a cohort-level descriptive change rather than an individual treatment effect, a limitation that tempers the strength of any causal claims that might otherwise be drawn from this result.

Session 3, which focused on learner transitions, began with high baseline knowledge among participants. The pre-test mean was 4.67 out of 5 and the post-test mean was 4.93, a difference of 0.26, calculated from 79 attendees, of whom 75 completed the pre-test and 69 completed the post-test. This pattern is consistent with a ceiling effect, in that participants already understood basic transition concepts prior to the session, so the session primarily consolidated and refined existing knowledge rather than introducing substantially new content. Participant feedback emphasized practical strategies, the role of the IEP team, collaboration, organization and time-management supports, and preparation for education, employment, and independent living, indicating that despite the modest numerical gain, participants valued the applied and practice-oriented focus of the session.

The intensive KST workshop provided an eight-hour application-focused format for 27 participants and represented the most concentrated application-oriented component of the initiative. Content included behavior intervention and de-escalation, high-quality IEP writing, differentiation and Universal Design for Learning (UDL), executive functioning, autism and sensory supports, and progress monitoring, and participants produced behavior plans, IEP goals, lesson plans, and monitoring tools as tangible outputs of the workshop. The terminal report described increased confidence and improved competency among participants, while also identifying time constraints and substantial variation in prior knowledge as limiting factors. Recommendations arising from this workshop included advanced follow-up sessions, coaching, technical assistance, stronger monitoring systems, and school- or district-level communities of practice, underscoring that a single intensive session, while valuable, was perceived by participants and facilitators alike as insufficient on its own to sustain long-term competency development.

Taken together, the evidence across the four sessions can be synthesized along six evaluation domains. With respect to reach, the program spanned multiple virtual cohorts plus one intensive in-person workshop, indicating that the model is feasible across distance and can include diverse educator roles such as general education teachers, SPED teachers, school leaders, support personnel, and volunteer educators. With respect to acceptability, the high confidence rating of 4.45 out of 5 in Session 1 and generally positive qualitative feedback across sessions suggest that participants valued the content and consistently requested deeper application. With respect to immediate learning, the largest gain was observed in Session 2 at 0.99 points, while a smaller gain of 0.26 points was observed in Session 3 against a high baseline, a pattern indicating that sequenced content can build foundations and then consolidate advanced topics. With respect to application, the production of IEPs, behavior intervention plans (BIPs), lessons, and transition and monitoring tools indicates that output-based learning improves practical relevance for participants. With respect to sustainability need, the repeated recommendations for coaching, Learning Action Cells (LACs), follow-up, and monitoring across sessions demonstrate that training alone is insufficient and that implementation supports

are essential to translate learning into practice. Finally, with respect to evidence limitations, the presence of unmatched samples, short tests, self-report measures, and the absence of learner outcome data mean that claims arising from this evaluation should remain preliminary and should guide a stronger evaluation phase rather than being treated as conclusive evidence of program effect.

Building on these cross-session findings, the evaluation proposes a national framework named the Inclusive Education Capacity and Implementation Framework (IECIF), designed as a modular structure that can be piloted in a district or division and subsequently adapted for regional or national use. The framework comprises six mutually reinforcing components. The first component, competency-based professional learning, organizes professional learning into progressive levels of foundation, application, coaching, and leadership, wherein foundation modules cover rights, policy, disability and learner diversity, Child Find, and inclusive pedagogy; application modules address IEPs, accommodations, UDL, behavior support, assistive technology, progress monitoring, and transition; coaching modules support classroom implementation; and leadership modules prepare school heads, master teachers, and district personnel to establish systems, allocate resources, and monitor quality. The second component, contextualized implementation tools, recognizes that teachers need tools that are technically sound and usable in large classes and resource-constrained settings, including referral and screening guides, IEP templates, present-level and goal-writing exemplars, accommodation menus, UDL planning templates, ABC and behavior-plan forms, progress-monitoring charts, transition-planning templates, family meeting guides, and implementation checklists, all of which should be translated or adapted where necessary and reviewed for consistency with DepEd policy. The third component, coaching and professional learning communities, calls for each participating school to identify an inclusive education implementation team that participates in regular Learning Action Cell sessions, artifact review, case consultation, and coaching, with coaches trained to provide non-evaluative feedback, model strategies, review data, and help teachers solve context-specific barriers, and with virtual coaching available to supplement in-person support for geographically isolated schools. The fourth component, school-based demonstration projects, proposes that training culminate in a school-based capstone project, such as a Child Find and referral pathway, an IEP implementation system, an inclusive literacy or numeracy intervention, a behavior-support system, a transition program, an accessibility audit, or a family-partnership initiative, with each project required to define a problem, baseline, intervention, implementation indicators, outcomes, and sustainability plan. The fifth component, monitoring, evaluation, and research, calls for a monitoring system that moves beyond attendance and satisfaction to track five levels, namely participation; knowledge and confidence; quality of professional products; implementation fidelity and school systems; and learner participation, progress, and transition outcomes, using a mixed-methods design that combines surveys, knowledge tests, rubrics, classroom observations, interviews, document review, and learner data, with results disaggregated by role, school context, geography, and prior training. The sixth component, governance, partnership, and sustainability, establishes that sustainable scale requires formal governance, with implementation teams coordinating practice at the school level, technical working groups supporting training, coaching, and data use at district and division levels, universities contributing research, validation, and trainer preparation, professional organizations supporting dissemination and peer review, local government units and community partners strengthening accessibility and related services, and national coordination establishing quality standards while permitting contextual adaptation.

The implementation of this framework is envisioned across five sequential phases. The preparation phase, lasting three to six months, involves partnership agreements, needs assessment, ethics and data planning, trainer preparation, and tool adaptation, with the decision gate for advancement being that readiness standards are met. The pilot phase, lasting six to

twelve months, involves foundation and application modules, coaching, school capstones, and baseline and follow-up measurement, with the decision gate being that feasibility and acceptability are demonstrated. The refinement phase, lasting three to six months, involves revising modules, rubrics, coaching protocols, and data systems, with the decision gate being that the implementation package is finalized. The expansion phase, lasting twelve to twenty-four months, involves train-the-trainer activities, additional districts or divisions, and comparative evaluation, with the decision gate being evidence of consistent implementation. Finally, the scale and institutionalization phase is ongoing and involves policy integration, funding, accreditation, a research network, and national reporting, with the decision gate being sustained quality and equitable reach.

Corresponding to this phased implementation, a six-level monitoring and evaluation plan is proposed. Level 1, participation, tracks enrollment, completion, and role and school representation through attendance and learning platform records at each activity. Level 2, learning, tracks knowledge, confidence, and policy literacy through validated or reviewed pre/post measures administered before and after modules. Level 3, product quality, tracks the quality of IEPs, BIPs, lessons, and transition and monitoring tools through analytic rubrics and portfolio review conducted during modules and the capstone project. Level 4, implementation, tracks the use of strategies, team functioning, fidelity, and coaching dosage through observation, logs, interviews, and document review conducted monthly or quarterly. Level 5, learner outcomes, tracks participation, attendance, engagement, progress, behavior, and transition milestones through school records and learner assessments gathered at baseline and follow-up. Level 6, system outcomes, tracks referral pathways, family participation, Inclusive Learning Resource Center (ILRC) linkages, and resource allocation through school and division audits and reports conducted semiannually or annually.

The main contribution of the KST/KSA model lies in its combination of policy alignment, cross-national knowledge exchange, sequenced learning, data use, and applied outputs. The program demonstrates that an educator-led initiative can mobilize professional participation, create locally relevant materials, and produce measurable immediate learning indicators, and its alignment with the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) domains makes the work legible within existing teacher-development structures. At the same time, the evidence shows the limits of event-based professional development, as participants repeatedly requested deeper application, coaching, and follow-up, and the intensive workshop report recommended mentoring, Learning Action Cells, monitoring systems, and collaborative learning communities. These recommendations are not secondary additions but rather constitute the infrastructure required for implementation, and the proposed framework therefore reframes the KST initiative from a series of discrete events into a developmental pathway connected to school improvement.

International collaboration can add value to this initiative when it expands access to expertise and creates opportunities for comparative reflection, but it can also cause harm if foreign models are treated as universally transferable to the Philippine context. The initiative's strongest feature is its effort to align content with Philippine policies and professional standards, and future expansion should deepen local co-design, include learners with disabilities and families in governance, and ensure that Filipino educators are not only recipients but co-developers, trainers, researchers, and authors of the professional learning content. Republic Act 11650 requires coordinated implementation across multiple levels, and while the proposed framework addresses the teacher and school capacity portion of that mandate, it cannot substitute for staffing, financing, accessible facilities, assistive technology, related services, and interagency coordination. Capacity building should therefore be

embedded within broader implementation plans for Inclusive Learning Resource Centers, Child Find, assessment, family support, and transition services.

In synthesis, the findings across the four professional learning events, orientation in Session 1 with a mean confidence rating of 4.45 out of 5, foundational knowledge gains in Session 2 from a pre-test mean of 3.55 to a post-test mean of 4.54, consolidation of already high baseline knowledge in Session 3 from a pre-test mean of 4.67 to a post-test mean of 4.93, and applied competency development among 27 participants in the intensive workshop, demonstrate that the KST/KSA initiative is feasible, generally well received, and capable of producing measurable immediate learning and practical outputs, while also revealing that training events alone are insufficient without coaching, monitoring, and systemic implementation support. These results directly address the evaluation's objectives of assessing feasibility, participation, immediate learning, and implementation readiness, and they contribute to the broader field of inclusive education capacity building by illustrating how an educator-led, policy-aligned model can be reframed from isolated training events into a structured, six-component national framework, the Inclusive Education Capacity and Implementation Framework, supported by a phased implementation timeline and a multilevel monitoring and evaluation plan. At the same time, the evidentiary limitations inherent in the available data, including unmatched pre- and post-test samples, short and non-externally-validated assessment instruments, reliance on self-report, and the absence of learner outcome data, indicate that the present findings should be regarded as preliminary rather than conclusive. These findings and their attendant limitations provide the empirical and conceptual foundation for the summary, conclusions, and recommendations presented in the succeeding chapter.

CONCLUSION

The Philippines has established a strong legal and policy foundation for inclusive education. The next challenge is to build the implementation capacity required to make those commitments visible in classrooms, schools, and communities. The KST/KSA initiative offers a credible starting point: it reached diverse educators, generated positive engagement, produced immediate learning gains in foundational content, consolidated transition knowledge, and engaged participants in applied planning tasks.

Its long-term value will depend on whether it evolves from an educator-led training series into a supported implementation system. The Inclusive Education Capacity and Implementation Framework proposed in this paper provides a pathway for that evolution. It connects competency-based learning with contextualized tools, coaching, demonstration projects, research, and governance. The framework should now be tested through ethical, collaborative, and methodologically rigorous pilots. With sustained partnerships and transparent evaluation, the initiative can contribute to the practical implementation of Republic Act No. 11650 and to a broader culture in which learner diversity is treated as a core responsibility of the education system.

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